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SUBJECT: GANG VIOLENCE SPARKS CALLS FOR TOUGHER MEASURES

Classified By: Political Counselor James F. Cole for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Following the murder of an outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) associate in full view of hundreds of travelers at Sydney Airport on March 22, the GOA and New South Wales (NSW) are calling for tougher efforts against gang-related violence. The Deputy National Security Adviser told us that two issues concerned the national government: the slow response of security at the airport, and the potentially overreaching scope of the NSW legislation. END SUMMARY

THE VIOLENCE SPILLS OUT INTO THE OPEN

12. (SBU) On March 22, in front of hundreds of horrified travelers, members of two rival motorcycle gangs (OMCG) brawled at Sydney Airport's domestic terminal. Airport security did not respond in time to prevent the melee in which one OMCG associate died from a beating. A week later, the brother of the man killed at the airport was gunned down in a drive-by shooting outside his home.

13. (SBU) According to law enforcement sources, these recent incidents are part of a national problem of gang violence. There have been gang-related shootings for over 90 consecutive days in Sydney, for example. Law enforcement officials believe that OMCG violence is a problem not just for NSW, but for all the states and territories. U.S. experts note that part of the problem is that the states need effective conspiracy statutes and RICO legislation to combat the gangs, many of whose members are allegedly involved in drug trafficking, prostitution and protection rackets. In addition, there needs to be a national approach. Following South Australia's passing of new legislation in March 2008, for example, the OMCGs simply shifted much of their activities to NSW and Queensland.

THE NATIONAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS RESPOND

14. (U) On March 24, PM Rudd commented to the press that the OMCG violence at Sydney Airport "shows that we have a problem on our hands when it comes to organized 'bikie' gang violence across the country. Therefore I'm advised from Australia today that the next meeting of the Standing Committee of the Attorneys-General will be looking specifically at what further actions across the nation are necessary." The NSW Government has proposed a new law that would subject gang members to arrest and imprisonment for up to two years if they associate with one another after a judge has designated a gang a "criminal organization."

NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE

15. (C/NF) COMMENT: The gangs' criminal activities aside, the incident and its aftermath have raised several other issues. Deputy National Angus Campbell noted to us this week that the Sydney Airport incident had sparked broader security concerns, particularly in the worrying lack of response by any of the approximately 400 security personnel at Sydney

Airport. "Where were they on March 22?" he asked rhetorically. At the same time, Campbell foreshadowed possible legal challenges to the NSW government's plan to place tighter restrictions on individuals' rights of association, echoing the views of many in the Sydney legal community that NSW's proposed legislation looked overreaching.

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